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Students' preference for dentistry: effective factors and personality analysis

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ABSTRACT

Aims: The aim of this study was to understand the personality traits and occupational preferences of dental students and to evaluate the possible relationships between these two factors.

Methods: In this study, research was conducted on volunteer students studying at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Faculty of Dentistry in the 2023-2024 academic year. The research questions and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised/Shortened Form (EKA-GGK) were administered to the participants through face-to-face interviews. Sociodemographic characteristics, reasons for choosing a profession and personality traits of the students were evaluated.

Results: 20.32% of the participants preferred dentistry because it is ta prestigious profession in the society, followed by financial return (18.32%) and job guarantee (14.97%). There was no significant relationship between the results of the Eysenck Personality Scale and the reasons for choosing dentistry as a profession ($p>0.05$). In the study, the neuroticism sub-dimension was found to be significantly higher in female participants than in male participants ($p=0.017$). Extraversion, psychoticism and lying sub-dimensions did not show a significant difference according to variables such as gender, age, number of siblings, mother's education level and income level. However, it was observed that the level of father's education was effective on the extraversion score; children of fathers who graduated from high school had higher extraversion scores compared to children of fathers with secondary school or lower education level ($p=0.045$).

Conclusion: Social status and financial return were the most important reasons for students to choose dentistry, while family desire was less effective. The results of the Eysenck Personality Scale showed that the students were generally emotionally balanced, open to social relationships, compliant with social norms and non-aggressive individuals.

Keywords: Dentistry, dental student, students' preference, personality traits, occupational preferences

INTRODUCTION

Professions in the field of health sciences attract a great deal of attention due to their wide range of job opportunities and the high value society places on these professions.[1] In many countries, especially in developing countries, only a small percentage of the population qualifies for dental education.[2] In order to be successful in the dental profession, individuals who have strong manual skills, are prone to effective social relations, can communicate effectively with people and have the ability to access up-to-date information continuously are required.[3] The process of deciding on a career choice is complex, and choosing a career such as dentistry is no exception. Career choice is personal and can vary depending on one's goals, values, and interests. Salary, working hours, and financial stability can be important factors in career choice. The stability provided by the job and the status in society can be among the factors that shape career choice. The nature of the occupation should be compatible with personal interests and abilities. The difficulty and fulfillment of the occupation may be influential in the choice. People's desire to interact with other people can influence career choice. Some may prefer to choose a social profession. One's abilities, interests and manual skills may be a determining factor in career choice.[4,5] Studies investigating the reasons for preferring dental faculties have been conducted especially in developed countries. These studies were conducted in countries such as Denmark, the United Kingdom,[6,7] North America,[5] Ireland,[8] and Kuwait,[9] as well as in England.[10] Although effective factors have been studied in students choosing the dental profession in Turkiye, personality types have not been analyzed.[3,11,12] Dental career choices are shaped by interest-based and altruistic motivations in different regions, with some areas emphasizing both the moral and economic aspects of the profession, while others prioritize lifestyle advantages. This study is particularly significant in that it examines the personality factors underlying career choices in specific professional fields like dentistry. While

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existing literature often focuses on the motivations behind career choices, this study takes an important step by exploring the potential relationships between personality traits and professional preferences. This approach can facilitate a better understanding of the fundamental factors that influence the process of choosing a career in dentistry.

Although studies in the literature, especially in developed countries, have examined the reasons for choosing the dental profession in detail, these studies mostly focused on motivations for choice and did not adequately examine the relationship between personality traits and occupational preferences. The aim of this study was to understand the personality traits and occupational preferences of dental students and to evaluate the possible relationships between these two factors.

Null Hypothesis (H0)

There is no statistically significant relationship between the personality traits of dental students and their career choices.

METHODS

The study was approved by the Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Faculty of Medicine Non-interventional Clinical Researches Ethics Committee (Date: 26.12.2023, Decision No: 2023/104). All procedures were carried out in accordance with the ethical rules and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The study was conducted with volunteer students studying at Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Faculty of Dentistry in the 2023-2024 academic year. The research questions and personality inventory were applied to the participants face to face. Participants were informed about the study. Informed consent was obtained from the participants before the questions to be asked. The first part included questions about the participants' sociodemographic characteristics and reasons for choosing dentistry (Table 1).

Eysenck's Personality Questionnaire Revised/Abbreviated Form (EKA-GGK): Developed by Eysenck, Eysenck and Barrett, the EKA-GGK was adapted into Turkish by Karancı et al.[13] and permission to use the scale was obtained. The scale consists of four sub-dimensions named extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and lying and 24 items. In the scale where each factor is evaluated with 6 items, the participant is asked to respond to 24 questions in the form of yes (1) - no (0). The score for each personality trait varies between 0 and 6. Considering the criteria that a high score in a sub-dimension indicates the dominance in that personality trait, items 5, 7, 10, 17 and 19 in the lying sub-dimension, items 15 and 20 in the extraversion dimension, and items 3, 16 and 22 in the psychoticism sub-dimension were reverse coded. Each sub-personality dimension score was obtained by summing the scores obtained from the questionnaire items forming the relevant dimension (Table 2).

Table 1. Survey form on sociodemographic characteristics and reasons for choosing dentistry

1. Your age:…….
2. Gender:…….
3. Your mother's education level:
a. None
b. Primary school
c. Secondary education
d. University or higher
4. Is your mother alive?
a. Yes
b. No
5. Your father's education level:
a. None
b. Primary school
c. Secondary education
d. University or higher
6. Is your father alive?
a. Yes
b. No
7. How many siblings do you have?
a. 1
b. 2
c. 3 or more
d. None
8. What is your family income level?
a. Low (minimum wage or below)
b. Medium (13,000-50,000)
c. High (51,000 and above)
9. Do you have any systemic diseases?
a. Yes
b. No
10. What is your reason for choosing dentistry? (You can select more than one option)
a. Job security
b. My family's request
c. I believe I am suitable based on my abilities
d. Guidance from teachers
e. Guidance from dentists I know
f. Due to receiving dental treatment
g. It is a prestigious profession in society
h. Financial benefits
i. Comfortable working conditions
j. Other:…….

Statistical Analysis

The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to determine whether the variables meet the normality assumption. Median (minimum-maximum) values were given for continuous variables that did not meet the normality assumption. In comparisons between two groups, Mann-Whitney U test was used in cases where the normality assumption was not met. Kruskal-Wallis H test was used when the normality assumption was not met in comparisons of three or more groups. The relationship between the sub-dimensions of the scale was examined by Spearman correlation analysis. SPSS (IBM Corp. Released 2017. IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 25.0) program was used for statistical analysis and $p<0.05$ (α) was considered statistically significant.

Table 2. Eysenck Personality Test
Please answer each question below by marking 'yes' or 'no'. There are no right or wrong answers, and no trick questions. Respond quickly and avoid spending too much time thinking about the exact meaning of the questions
Does your mood often fluctuate between happiness and unhappiness?
Yes
No
Are you a talkative person?
Yes
No
Does being in debt make you anxious?
Yes
No
Are you a very lively person?
Yes
No
Have you ever been greedy by taking more than your fair share?
Yes
No
Do you use drugs that might have strange or dangerous effects?
Yes
No
Have you ever blamed someone else for something you knew was your own fault?
Yes
No
Do you prefer to follow your own path rather than adhere to rules?
Yes
No
Do you often feel tired of everything?
Yes
No
Have you ever taken something that belonged to someone else (even a pin or button)?
Yes
No
Would you describe yourself as a nervous person?
Yes
No
Do you think marriage is outdated and should be abolished?
Yes
No
Can you easily bring life to a rather dull party?
Yes
No
Are you an anxious person?
Yes
No
Do you tend to stay in the background in social situations?
Yes
No
Does knowing there are mistakes in your work make you worried?
Yes
No
Have you ever cheated in any game?
Yes
No
Do you often complain about your nerves?
Yes
No
Have you ever exploited someone for your own benefit?
Yes
No
Are you mostly quiet when with others?
Yes
No
Do you often feel lonely?
Yes
No
Is it better to follow societal rules than to do what you think is right?
Yes
No
Do others often consider you a very lively person?
Yes
No
Do you always practice what you preach to others?
Yes
No

RESULTS

The mean age of the participants was 19.45±1.30 years, 55.3% were female and 44.7% were male. In the age distribution, 25% were 17-18 years old, 53.9% were 19-20 years old, and 21.1% were 21 years and older. The mother's education level was 38.2% middle school and below, 27.6% high school, 34.2% university; the father's education level was 28.9% middle school and below, 34.2% high school, 36.8% university. All of the mothers and 98.7% of the fathers of the participants were alive. The distribution of the number of siblings was 26.3% single siblings, 36.8% two siblings, 18.4% three siblings, 18.4% four or more siblings. Monthly income was 19.7% low, 69.7% medium, 10.5% high. Systemic diseases were present in 6.6% of the participants (Table 3).

Table 3. Sociodemographic characteristics of ındividuals participating in the study

Variables	n	%
Age (mean±SD)	19.45±1.30	
Gender		
Female	42	55.3
Male	34	44.7
Age		
17-18	19	25.0
19-20	41	53.9
21-23	16	21.1
Mother's education level		
Middle school or below	29	38.2
High school	21	27.6
University	26	34.2
Father's education level		
Middle school or below	22	28.9
High school		34.2
University	28	36.8
Mother alive		
Yes	76	100.0
Father alive		
Yes	75	98.7
No	1	1.3
Number of siblings		
≤1	20	26.3
2	28	36.8
3	14	18.4
≥4	14	18.4
Monthly income (TL)		
Low	15	19.7
Medium	53	69.7
High	8	10.5
Systemic disease		
Yes	5	6.6
No	71	93.4

SD: Standard deviation

When the reasons for preferring dentistry were analyzed, it was seen that the statement "It is a prestigious profession in the society" had the highest rate of 20.32%. The second

highest rate belonged to the statement "Financial return". The rates were "Job guarantee" with 14.97%, "I think I am suitable when I consider my abilities" with 12.83%, "My family's request" with 9.63%, and "Comfortable working conditions" with 8.56% (Table 4).

Table 4. Reasons why the individuals participating in the study preferred dentistry

Reasons for Preference	n	%
Job guarantee	28	14.97
My family's request	18	9.63
Considering my abilities, I think I am suitable	24	12.83
Guidance from teachers	4	2.14
Guidance from dentists you know	5	2.67
Due to dental treatment	6	3.21
Being a prestigious profession in the society	38	20.32
Tangible return	36	19.25
Comfortable working conditions	16	8.56
Other	12	6.42

Since the question is multiple choice, it is expressed as a percentage

Eysenck Personality Scale was used in the study. Although the scale has four sub-dimensions, the neuroticism sub-dimension has a minimum score of 0, a maximum score of 6, a median value of 3, a mean of 2.89 and a standard deviation of 1.63. Extraversion sub-dimension has a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 6, with a mean of 3.45, a median value of 4 and a standard deviation of 1.90. Psychoticism sub-dimension has a minimum score of 0 and a maximum score of 5, with a mean of 1.66, a median of 1.16 and a standard deviation of 1.16. The minimum score of the lying sub-dimension was 0, the maximum score was 6, the mean was 3.50, the median value was 3 and the standard deviation was 1.59 (Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the scale used in the study

Eysenck Personality Inventory (n=76)	Median	Min	Max	x	SD
Neuroticism	3	0	6	2.89	1.63
Extraversion	4	0	6	3.45	1.90
Psychoticism	2	0	5	1.66	1.16
Lie	3	0	6	3.50	1.59

Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum, *x*: Mean, SD: Standard deviation

The neuroticism score, which is a sub-dimension of the Eysenck Personality Scale, differed between genders, with females having a higher score (p=0.017). Extraversion, psychoticism and lying sub-dimension scores did not differ between genders (p>0.05). There was no significant difference between the age distribution of the individuals who participated in the study in terms of neuroticism, extraversion, psychoticism and lying sub-dimensions of the Eysenck Personality Scale (p>0.05). It was also determined that the sub-dimensions of the Eysenck Personality Scale did not differ between the mother's education levels (p>0.05). There was a difference between the father's education levels in terms of the extraversion score, which is a sub-dimension of the Eysenck Personality Scale (p=0.045). In the subgroup analyzes, it was determined that the extraversion score of individuals whose fathers had high school education level was higher than individuals whose fathers had secondary school and below education level (p=0.042). There was no significant difference between father education levels in terms of Eysenck Personality Scale sub-dimensions neuroticism, psychoticism and lying scores (p>0.05). It was also determined that the Eysenck Personality Scale sub-dimensions did not differ between the distribution of the number of siblings (p>0.05). The Eysenck Personality Scale sub-dimensions did not differ according to monthly income levels (p>0.05). Since the reasons for preference were stated as multiple choice, it was determined that the Eysenck Personality Scale sub-dimensions did not differ between the distributions determined according to the frequency of the selected answers (p>0.05) (Table 6).

Table 6. Comparison of Eyseck Personality Scale sub-dimensions in terms of sociodemographic characteristics

Variables		Neuroticism	Extraversion	Psychoticism	Lie
Gender	Female	3 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-5)	4 (0-6)
	Male	2 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-3)	3 (0-6)
p value[a]		0.017	0.574	0.799	0.066
Age	17-18	3 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-4)	4 (0-6)
	19-20	3 (0-6)	3 (0-6)	2 (0-4)	3 (1-6)
	21-23	2 (0-6)	4 (2-6)	2 (0-5)	3.5(0-6)
p value[b]		0.203	0.151	0.747	0.999
Mother education level	Middle school and below	3 (0-6)	3 (0-6)	1 (0-5)	4 (0-6)
	High school	2 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-4)	3 (0-6)
	University	3 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-4)	3 (1-6)
p value[b]		0.484	0.608	0.309	0.345
Father education level	Middle school and below	3 (1-6)	2.5 (0-6)	1.5 (0-5)	4.5(2-6)
	High school	3 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-3)	3 (0-6)
	University	3 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-4)	4 (0-6)
p value[b]		0.527	0.045	0.635	0.072
Number of siblings	≤1	2.5 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-4)	4 (1-6)
	2	3 (1-6)	3.5 (0-6)	2 (0-5)	3 (0-5)
	3	3 (0-6)	3.5 (1-6)	2 (0-4)	3.5(1-6)
	≥4	2 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	1.5 (0-4)	4.5 (0-6)
p value[b]		0.379	0.936	0.596	0.249
Monthly income (TL)	Low	2 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	1 (0-3)	4 (1-6)
	Middle	3 (0-6)	4 (0-6)	2 (0-5)	3 (0-6)
	Good	3.5 (2-6)	4 (1-5)	2 (0-4)	3.5 (2-5)
p value[b]		0.084	0.931	0.550	0.295

p<0.05 significance level, Variables are given with median (minimum-maximum) values, a: Mann-Whitney U test, b: Kruskal-Wallis H test, TL: Turkish Liras

DISCUSSION

In this study, the reasons for preference and personality characteristics of dental students were analyzed. The null hypothesis (H0) that there is no statistically significant relationship between the personality traits of dental students and their career choices was accepted. Reasons for choosing the dental profession and perceptions towards the profession have been addressed in various studies in different countries.[4,17-19] However, there is a limited number of studies on this subject in Turkiye and the personality traits

of students and the possible relationship between these traits and career choice have not been sufficiently investigated.[3,20-22]

It has been reported that the factors for choosing dentistry as a career may vary among students in different countries and over time.[14] In this study, when the reasons for students to choose dentistry were analyzed, it was observed that the most common motivation was that the profession had a prestigious position in the society. This finding shows that social status and prestige are among the determining factors in choosing the dental profession. In addition, "financial return" ranks second and it is revealed that economic benefit also plays an important role. On the other hand, family desire and working conditions ranked last among the reasons for choice.

Similarly, Mohebbi et al.[16] found that high income level and good social status were among the most common motivations for dental students' career choice. In addition, Hashemipour et al.[14] reported that good income and human relations were important motivators for choosing dentistry. Crosley et al.[4] emphasized status and security as well as regular working hours, self-employment opportunity and independence among the reasons why dental students prefer this profession. In addition, Siddiqui et al.[18] stated that dentistry is often chosen as an alternative to medical school and factors such as professional satisfaction and career flexibility are among the important motivations. In addition, Du Toit et al.[19] reported that reasons such as maintaining work-life balance thanks to flexible working hours, spending more time for family and supporting those in need were important motivations for choosing the dental profession. When we look at the studies conducted in Turkiye, in the study by Küçükeşmen et al.[3] more than half of the students stated that "they wanted to be a physician or dentist, but they entered the faculty of dentistry because of the score ranking in the university entrance exam". In this case, family desire also came to the fore after the score they earned. In this study, family desire came after financial income and social status among the reasons for preference. In the study by Büyükbayraktar et al.[20] evaluating the perceptions of dentistry and medical faculty students about their profession, dentistry students considered working conditions as a more important factor than medical faculty students. Köşker et al.[21] found that young people who chose dentistry as a profession were mostly influenced by their families, and that the presence of a family member working in the health field was especially effective on these preferences. In the study by Ayar et al.,[22] the reputation, lifestyle and ease of finding a job were among the prominent reasons for students' motivation to become dentists. A review of the literature reveals that the choice of dentistry as a profession varies depending on the geography, culture, and socioeconomic conditions in which students live.[9,10,11,16,18]

In this study, no statistically significant relationship was found between the reasons for choosing a profession and the results of the Eysenck Personality Scale ($p>0.05$). However, when the personality traits of the students were analyzed, it was observed that they scored low to medium in the neuroticism sub-dimension, medium in the extraversion and lying sub-dimensions, and low in the psychoticism sub-dimension. These results suggest that students are generally emotionally balanced, open to social relationships, and empathetic. These characteristics can be considered as a positive result for a patient-oriented profession. Furthermore, Chamberlain et al.[23] found that Conscientiousness was positively correlated with academic performance, and low Neuroticism combined with high Conscientiousness, particularly its Deliberation facet, strongly predicted professional behavior scores. Another study examining the personality traits of dental professionals within the framework of the big five model evaluated differences among occupational groups. In terms of neuroticism, oral and maxillofacial surgeons had the lowest scores, while general dental practitioners had the highest, with dental nurses falling between these two groups. Moreover, orthodontists and oral and maxillofacial surgeons exhibited lower neuroticism levels compared to dental nurses. However, no specific findings were reported regarding extraversion, as the study primarily focused on neuroticism, conscientiousness, and agreeableness.[24] Moreover, the low to moderate neuroticism scores indicate that students are mostly able to cope with stress, although they may have some anxiety tendencies. Additionally, moderate scores in the extraversion and lying sub-dimensions reflect a tendency toward social adaptation and compliance with social norms,[25] whereas low psychoticism scores indicate that students are non-aggressive and adhere to norms.

The small sample size may be a reason why no statistically significant relationship was found, which could limit the power to detect potential connections between personality traits and career choice. Consequently, this study, by conducting a thorough analysis of personality factors influencing career choices in a specific professional field like dentistry, can serve as an important reference point for future research. Illuminating the relationships between personality traits and professional preferences may enable the development of more targeted and personalized educational programs and career counseling services.

Studies on dental students in Ireland and the United Kingdom also support these findings. In Ireland, the personality traits of dental students were found to be largely in line with age and gender norms. Among students in the United Kingdom, extraversion scores were higher than expected and neuroticism scores of male students were lower than expected.[26] Furthermore, in a study conducted among dental hygienists, it was found that extraverted and less neurotic students had the highest scores in department satisfaction and personality types had a significant effect on department satisfaction and academic achievement.[27]

In another study, a questionnaire-based method was used to assess the personality styles of students applying to a dental undergraduate program. The Keirsey Temperament Classifier was used to measure students' personality preferences in the dimensions of extraversion, sensing, thinking and judgment. The study confirmed the dominance of the judgmental temperament type. This shows that students generally tend to be organized, planned, responsible and rule-bound.[28] In addition, in this study, the neuroticism scores of female students were significantly higher than those of male students ($p=0.017$). Similarly, in Tatlılıoğlu's study,[29] it was found that women had higher emotional instability/neuroticism scores than men. Father's education level created a significant difference in the extraversion sub-dimension, and it was determined that extraversion scores of students whose fathers were high school graduates were higher than those of students whose fathers had secondary school or lower education level ($p=0.042$). Existing evidence suggests that personality traits are affected by parental attitudes and educational level.[30,31] In

Yeşilyaprak's study,[30] it was found that the mother's education level positively affected the personality structure of female students, but there was no significant relationship between the father's education level and personality traits.

Limitations

The study may have certain limitations regarding the number of participants and their diversity. Particularly in Turkiye, where participants are selected from a single region or university, generalizing the findings to dental students in different geographic or cultural environments may be challenging. To increase statistical power and generalize findings, future studies should aim for a larger and more diverse sample. Expanding the geographic scope of the research can help in understanding cultural and regional differences in career motivation and personality traits.

CONCLUSION

It was observed that the most important reasons for students to prefer dentistry were the social status and financial return provided by the profession. The desire of the family was found to be a less determining factor in preferences. According to the results of the Eysenck Personality Scale, the neuroticism levels of the students were found to be low-moderate, extraversion and lying sub-dimensions were found to be moderate, and psychoticism was found to be low. In other words, it shows that students are generally emotionally balanced, moderately open to social relations, compatible with social norms and far from aggressiveness.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Ethics Committee Approval

The study was approved by the Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University Faculty of Medicine Non-interventional Clinical Researches Ethics Committee (Date: 26.12.2023, Decision No: 2023/104).

Informed Consent

All patients signed and free and informed consent form.

Referee Evaluation Process

Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

Financial Disclosure

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

Author Contributions

All of the authors declare that they have all participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the paper, and that they have approved the final version.

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